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April 19, 2011

Donna Kelly, Grant Officer
U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration
Division of Federal Assistance
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Room N4716
Washington, D.C. 20210

RE: SGA/DFA PY 10-03

Dear Ms. Kelly:

I write in support of the MoHealthWINs grant application submitted for the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grants Program. MoHealthWINs is a consortium application that draws on the strengths of each member of the consortium, which includes all of Missouri's public two-year colleges. MoHealthWINs will dramatically improve the lives of the 4,600 Missourians the consortium colleges are committed to serving, and it has the power to bring about systemic change that will benefit our state for years to come.

Today, 9.1% of our state's citizens are unemployed. These Missourians want to work, but many lack the skills they need to get hired in today's workforce. Most understand that they need to return to school to get those skills, but family responsibilities, geographic isolation, financial pressures, and lack of academic preparation create significant obstacles for them.

MoHealthWINs will meet these unemployed Missourians where they are, providing the training, support, and flexibility they need to get back to work quickly. The project will help students who don't have the luxury of thinking about education as a marathon, but must instead approach it as a series of sprints. Students who receive training through MoHealthWINs will see the economic value of discrete segments of education that lead to an industry-recognized credential.

Missouri's public higher education system has struggled to meet the needs of adult learners. Individual colleges have had some successes, but those results have generally not been analyzed, discussed, and adopted in a systematic way. Consequently, two-thirds of our community college students leave college before they complete a degree, and many never make it beyond remedial coursework.

Missouri's MoHealthWINs proposal includes strategies proven successful in other states to increase retention and decrease the time it takes unemployed adults to earn a degree or certificate. The funds received through the grant will allow unprecedented levels of cooperation and collaboration among our public two-year colleges, and will support a collective discussion about which strategies are succeeding and which strategies need to be reevaluated.

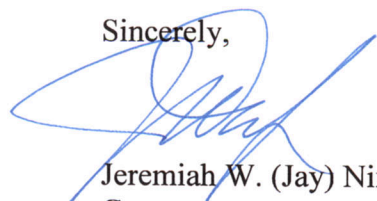
Missouri's health care system is facing critical shortages in the skilled workers necessary to serve the state's aging population. We need nurses and others who care directly for patients, but we also need more technicians to perform the increasingly sophisticated support functions health care facilities require to operate. Employment data clearly indicate that each of the occupations targeted in the MoHealthWINs proposal will experience significant and sustained growth during the next ten years. The proposal is also closely aligned with our state's Strategic Initiative for Economic Growth, which identifies health care as one of seven high-growth industries that will drive economic vitality in the state.

I am confident in the consortium members' ability to work together to accomplish the objectives outlined in the proposal. Each of Missouri's community colleges is governed by a locally elected board of trustees, but they have a decades-long tradition of working together voluntarily to advance common agendas through the Missouri Community College Association (MCCA). Presidents/chancellors, chief academic officers, chief financial officers, and other key groups meet regularly to make difficult decisions, such as distribution of state funds among schools, identification of consistent entrance requirements for college-level work, and selection of a health insurance provider to serve employees at each college. This history will serve Missouri well as it implements MoHealthWINs.

My support for MoHealthWINs will continue after I sign this letter. In August, I challenged our state's higher education leaders with meeting the "Big Goal" – increasing the percent of Missourians who hold a postsecondary credential from 37% to 60% percent by 2020. We cannot reach that goal without significantly improving the way we educate adults, and we cannot change the way we educate adults with incremental changes alone. I am committed to working with our two-year colleges and the Missouri Department of Higher Education to address the statutory, regulatory, or policy changes needed to ensure that support for innovations proven to be successful in MoHealthWINs becomes embedded in our higher education system.

Finally, the lessons learned in the early stages of implementing this grant will inform my work as Chair of the National Governors Association's Education, Early Childhood and Workforce Committee. That committee's higher education work has focused on creating a seamless educational pipeline from preschool to college, but it must also serve people for whom the educational pipeline has been disconnected and disjointed. I look forward to reporting to that committee that Missouri's higher education is serving unemployed adults more effectively, and to using our state's data to better inform NGA's educational policy recommendations.

Sincerely,



Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon
Governor